

Sermon for Advent 3A  
Sunday, December 11, 2022  
“Are you the one?”

Text: Matthew 11:2-11

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” That is the question that John’s disciples asked Jesus in today’s Gospel reading. When we think about that question, we need to start by considering what that question meant in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century of the common era. Prophets, like Isaiah, Daniel, & Hosea, and the Psalms described a messianic figure, so by the time of John the Baptist and Jesus, there were many Jewish communities who were expecting a messiah. However, these communities did not agree as to the nature, identity, or activity of God’s anointed one who would usher in the end-time. Not all Jewish communities even concerned about the end-times; not all communities anticipated a messianic figure at all. But, among those Jewish communities who *were* anticipating the end-times, they, like John were asking, “Are you the one?” The Gospel according to Matthew stepped into the middle of this debate; according to Matthew, Jesus of Nazareth *is* “the one.” Indeed, Jesus defined the kingdom of heaven for his disciples, and their confidence in him as the Messiah formed the foundation of what would evolve into the Christian church.

The people of Jesus’ day lived in turbulent times having been conquered by numerous empires—the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks or Seleucid Dynasty, and finally the Romans. They were desperately awaiting a savior who would free them from foreign rule and re-establish the Kingdom of Israel. By the time St. Matthew wrote his gospel, some fifty years after Jesus lived, the people were still living under Roman rule, and the very rock of their faith—the Temple in Jerusalem—the very place where God was said to dwell, had been destroyed. They were convinced that the end-time was near. They believed that the one whom they knew was the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, would return during their lifetime, as they interpreted his words. Two thousand years later, we are still waiting for the Anointed One to return.

We still live in an age when we feel like the end-time is near. It seems like our communities are getting more and more violent, less and less safe and comfortable. It seems that people are acting more and more selfishly, thinking only of their own needs and interests, and acting less and less lovingly, caring about others and what happens for the good of society. It seems that some of those who lead us are more interested in keeping their elected offices than speaking out for truth, justice, equality, and charity. This may be a time in someone’s life when things seem like they’re spinning out of control; you just can’t catch up, the horse’s reins are just outside your grasp. Wars, the threat of war, terrorism, and instability among nations abound. So many things make us wonder if the end time is at hand. And if that isn’t enough to scare you, you might find someone outside a mall, many subway stations, or on various street corners passing out pamphlets warning passers-by that we are living in the last days. We have many

reasons to provoke us to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

However in the midst of it all, Matthew’s gospel delivers a message of hope that better times are already happening. Jesus responded to the question, “Are you the one?” by pointing out that the blind are receiving their sight, the lame are walking, the lepers are being cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are being raised, and the poor are having good news brought to them. End-time prophets of his day interpreted conditions such as the inability to see, walk, and hear as being characteristic of the brokenness of this world and signs of the final days. In the realm of heaven, God will release individuals and systems from these curses so that all interactions and relationships will take place according to God’s original purposes. Matthew’s gospel interprets the miracles of people regaining sight, the ability to walk and hear, and the dead being raised as signs that God is already beginning to manifest the realm of heaven here on earth, little-by-little, through the ministry of Jesus. The Christian church has continued that message. That has been the good news of hope for us in the centuries since Jesus was here in the flesh. We continue to live in the time of the “already and not yet.”

We know who is the one to come; we don’t have to ask. We know that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, that he lived and taught others how to live, that he died on a cross but was resurrected on the third day, that he ascended into heaven, and that he said he would return. Through him, we have something to live for and look forward to—eternal life—but we also have reason to have joy today.

We live in turbulent and tumultuous times, much like those of the disciples and Christians ever since. Jesus also taught us the principles how of to live from day-to-day with each other. We do live in an age of brokenness, but because we know the Messiah came once and we anticipate his return, we must do whatever we can do to bring this world and this age a little closer to realizing what the kingdom that God is like. We must adhere to the teachings of the One who came to help heal the brokenness of this world. We are the hands and feet and mouths of God, and so we should cooperate with God in making this world seem like a better place than it is and to offer hope in the midst of despair, desolation, and brokenness. Jesus asked the crowd why they went into the wilderness in the first place. To see a reed shaken by the wind or someone dressed in soft robes? Herod was known to use a reed as a symbol of his power; he and other leaders and supporters of the Roman Empire had lush homes along the banks of the Jordan River and they wore robes of soft cloth. But that’s not why the people went into the wilderness; they went to hear of the voice of him who cried in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” They went to hear the one who exhorted them repent and change their ways of living. They went into the wilderness to find hope, relief, and joy.

Today, the Church celebrates *Gaudete* Sunday. The word, *gaudete*, means ‘rejoice.’ Gaudete is the word that begins today’s mass: “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.” Words from St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians. No longer are we, the faithful, invited to anticipate “The Lord who is to come,” but today, we worship and

hail with joy “The Lord who is now nigh and close at hand.” I recently read something written by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Audrey Scanlan, who is Bishop of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania who wrote: “Happiness is thought to be an “external” emotion that has events, people, place, and things as its genesis or cause. Happiness is caused by earthly experiences and material objects. Joy, on the other hand, is an internal spiritual state that is the result of selfless behavior—caring for others, sacrificial giving, extending beyond one’s reach for another. In our tradition, joy is a mature Christian emotion.” Joy is the theme of *Gaudete* Sunday, and we should go forth with joy knowing that the one who is to come is nigh and close at hand. Christmas is just around the corner, but the joy of the holiday season is all around us now.

Even though we struggle to live in the midst of modern-day Herods carrying various reeds to justify their authority, the rich and powerful living in the finest homes and having the most expensive things, the threat of those who don’t want to guarantee health care for all, or relieving student debt, or putting food on tables, or the threat of war and terrorism, we can still proclaim to the world that there is still reason to be joyful. We can still help whomever we can to experience something better in their lives. We can still be witnesses that if we live better and act better we can bring a glimpse of the kingdom of God that we anticipate and anxiously await. We can still be agents of hope that God never stops giving us opportunities to make this world and this age more like the kingdom we await. We don’t need to wait for another, because we already know who came, whose teaching inspires his faithful followers to transform the world today, and will himself, some day, come again. Amen.

#### Resources

Ronald J. Allen, “Commentary on Matthew 11:2-11,” *The Working Preacher*, [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3091](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3091).

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Audrey C. Scanlan, “Dented Joy,” in [https://livingchurch.org/2022/11/10/dented-joy/?utm\\_source=The+Living+Church+Email+Updates&utm\\_campaign=152c07db7cEMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2022\\_12\\_01\\_06\\_24&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_152c07db7c-%5BLIST\\_EMAIL\\_ID%5D&mc\\_cid=152c07db7c&mc\\_eid=67c51f1e2e](https://livingchurch.org/2022/11/10/dented-joy/?utm_source=The+Living+Church+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=152c07db7cEMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2022_12_01_06_24&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_152c07db7c-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D&mc_cid=152c07db7c&mc_eid=67c51f1e2e)